MARVEL
031
AARON
LARROCA
DELGADO
STAR WARS
STAR WARS
SCREAMING CITADEL
PART 2 OF 5

THE SCREAMING CITADEL

Book VII, Part II

It is a time of turmoil for the galaxy. While the evil Galactic Empire remains strong, the Rebel Alliance continues to fight for freedom, and establishes a secret outpost deep in the Outer Rim.

Young rebel pilot Luke Skywalker struggles with his destiny. He can feel the Force, but without training, he cannot become a Jedi Knight. When rogue archaeologist Doctor Aphra approaches Luke with an offer—accompany her to meet a queen who can reactivate an artifact containing the consciousness of an ancient Jedi—he cautiously accepts.

Once at the Citadel of Ktath'atn—the Screaming Citadel—Aphra and Luke attempt to curry favor with the Queen. They are unsuccessful until Luke accidentally lashes out with the Force and attracts the Queen's attention—for better or for worse....

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Rebel Temporary Outpost, Horox III.
I'M TELLING YOU, I KNOW APHRA.
AND THIS IS NO COINCIDENCE, HAN.
NOT TODAY, OF ALL DAYS.
ONE DAY A YEAR, THE QUEEN OF KTATH'ATN SEES VISITORS AND GRANTS FAVORS IN EXCHANGE FOR RECEIVING THE GALAXY'S MOST INTERESTING ORGANIC ODDITIES.
AND THAT'S THE VERY SAME DAY THAT APHRA DECIDES TO KIDNAP OUR OWN FORCE-SENSITIVE, WANNABE JEDI?
NOT A COINCIDENCE, I'M TELLING YOU.
WAIT, WHAT DO YOU MEAN SHE "RECEIVES" THEM?

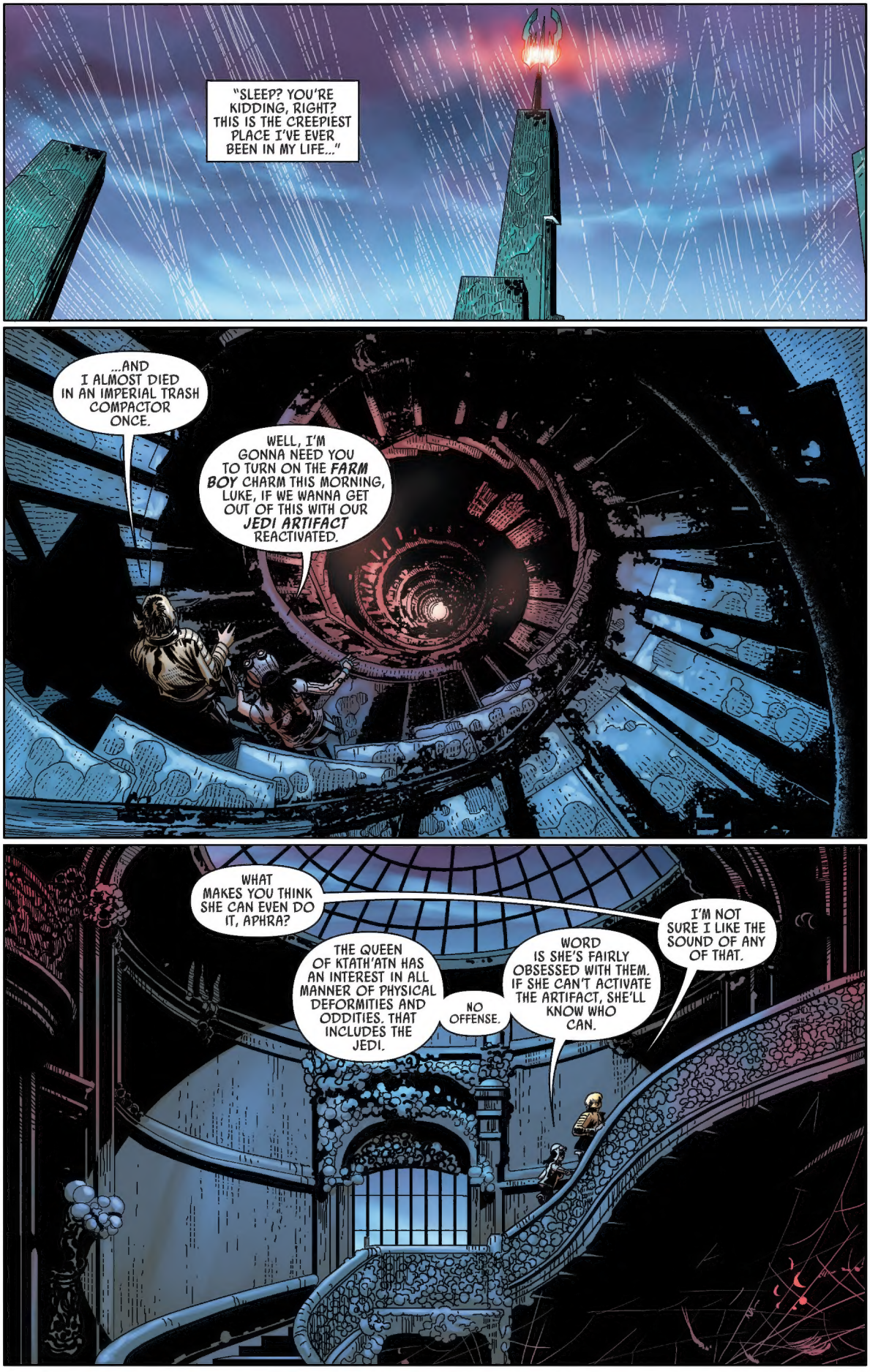
WHAT DO YOU *THINK* I MEAN, PRINCESS?
I THINK WE'D BETTER GET MOVING TO KTATH'ATN.
NOW.
SO, *SANA*... EXACTLY HOW *WELL* DO YOU KNOW THIS APHRA LADY?
DROP IT, HAN. DROP IT FAST.
IT'S JUST FUNNY YOU NEVER MENTIONED HER BEFORE, IS ALL. IS THERE SOMETHING I NEED TO KNOW?
TO MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS?
I DON'T DO THAT SO WELL WHEN MY SHIP IS INVOLVED. OR MY *LIFE*.
IN JUST THE TWO TIMES WE'VE CROSSED PATHS WITH THAT CRAZY DOCTOR, I'VE GOTTEN STRANGLED, KNOCKED UNCONSCIOUS, AND COVERED WITH WASP WORMS.
KEEP TALKING AND THAT'LL ALL HAPPEN AGAIN.
I JUST WANNA KNOW WHAT YOU'RE NOT TELLING US HERE.
RIGHT NOW, I'M NOT TELLING YOU TO TAKE A WALK INTO A STAR. EVEN THOUGH I REALLY, REALLY WANT TO. THAT'S THE BEST YOU'RE GONNA GET OUTTA ME TODAY, HAN SOLO.
NOW YOU WANNA GO SAVE THE KID OR NOT?

HRRRRRRGGGH!
I KNOW, CHEWIE, AND I'M SORRY, BUT IF SANA IS RIGHT AND LUKE'S ON KTATH'ATN, WE CAN'T RISK BRINGING A WOOKIEE WITH US.
BESIDES, WE'VE GOT ESSFOR HERE. HE'S THE NEXT BEST THING, RIGHT?
FUDDA WHUDD BRRP
SHUT UP. THAT WAS SARCASM.
SO THE PEOPLE ON KTATH'ATN REALLY DON'T LIKE WOOKIEES FOR SOME REASON. IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE WE KNOW ABOUT THE PLACE?
ONLY WHAT I'VE HEARD. DON'T DRINK THE WATER. SLEEP WITH ONE EYE OPEN.
"KEEP YOUR BLASTER HANDY AT ALL TIMES. AND ABOVE ALL ELSE...

"...NEVER TRUST THE QUEEN."
The Citadel of Ktath'atn.
THIS IS INTOLERABLE. I DEMAND TO SEE THE QUEEN AT ONCE.
THE RECEPTION HAS ENDED EARLY. THE QUEEN WILL RECEIVE VISITORS AGAIN NEXT YEAR. GO BACK TO WHERE YOU CAME FROM.
THAT IS SIMPLY NOT ACCEPTABLE!
WE HAVE COME ALL THE WAY FROM THE MOONS OF AI'KEN PRIME TO SEE THE QUEEN! DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHO I AM, YOU TRUMPED-UP LITTLE BUTLERS?
I AM LORD HOSSFERIN! OF THE VANDELAE STAR SYSTEM HOSSFERINS!
NOW GO AND FETCH YOUR SO-CALLED QUEEN AT ONCE! OR YOU WILL FEEL THE LEGENDARY HOSSFERIN WRATH!
AH, HERE COMES ONE OF HER LIEUTENANTS NOW. BOMBINAX, IS IT?
PERHAPS NOW WE CAN GET SOME--

WHA--
AAAAAAHHH!
LORD HOSSFERIN!
LOOK OUT, HE'S--
GUUGH
HHHG

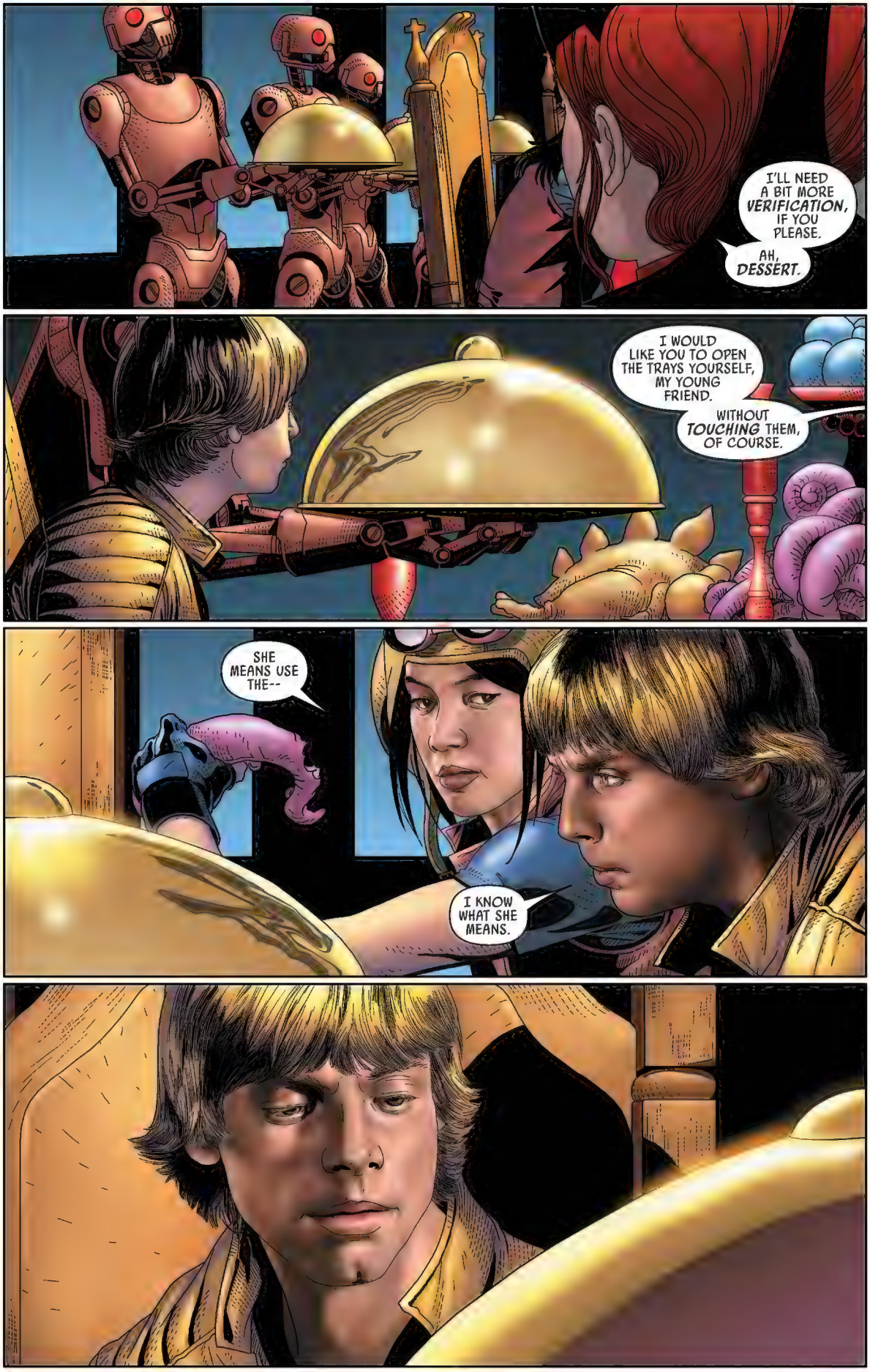
ENOUGH DISTRACTIONS. WHERE'S THE WOOKIEE?
IN, UH...IN QUARANTINE, SIR.
"I HOPE YOU GOT SOME SLEEP. WE'VE GOT A *BIG DAY* AHEAD OF US."


"SLEEP? YOU'RE KIDDING, RIGHT? THIS IS THE CREEPIEST PLACE I'VE EVER BEEN IN MY LIFE..."
...AND I ALMOST DIED IN AN IMPERIAL TRASH COMPACTOR ONCE.
WELL, I'M GONNA NEED YOU TO TURN ON THE FARM BOY CHARM THIS MORNING, LUKE, IF WE WANNA GET OUT OF THIS WITH OUR JEDI ARTIFACT REACTIVATED.
WHAT MAKES YOU THINK SHE CAN EVEN DO IT, APHRA?
I'M NOT SURE I LIKE THE SOUND OF ANY OF THAT.
THE QUEEN OF KTATH'ATN HAS AN INTEREST IN ALL MANNER OF PHYSICAL DEFORMITIES AND ODDITIES. THAT INCLUDES THE JEDI.
NO OFFENSE.
WORD IS SHE'S FAIRLY OBSESSED WITH THEM. IF SHE CAN'T ACTIVATE THE ARTIFACT, SHE'LL KNOW WHO CAN.

LAST TIME I WAS THE GUEST OF SOMEONE WHO WAS OBSESSED WITH THE JEDI, I ENDED UP FIGHTING FOR MY LIFE IN AN ARENA.
YEAH, I KNOW. I LOST GOOD CREDITS WHEN YOU DIDN'T DIE.
BUT THE QUEEN OF KTATH'ATN ISN'T GRAKKUS THE HUTT.
NO ARENA HERE, KID. JUST *BREAKFAST.*
SO THE QUEEN WILL HELP US IN EXCHANGE FOR... HAVING BREAKFAST WITH ME?
WELL, NOT EXACTLY. SEE THE ODDITIES THAT ARE BROUGHT BEFORE HER ONCE A YEAR...SHE DOESN'T JUST WANNA TAKE A GANDER AT THEM.
SHE *KEEPS* THEM.
SHE *WHAT?*
DON'T WORRY, LUKE. JUST LET ME DO ALL THE TALKING.
AH, AT LAST, THE GUEST OF HONOR HAS ARRIVED.

DO SIT DOWN.
THE KRILLCRAB EGGS ARE GETTING COLD.
AND IF YOU DON'T EAT THEM WHILE THEY'RE HOT, THEY TEND TO HATCH AND TEAR YOUR LIPS OFF.
PLEASE. SIT. EAT.
I KNOW I, FOR ONE...
...AM ABSOLUTELY STARVING.

A TATOOINE FARM BOY WITH FORCE POWERS.
WELL, YOU DON'T SEE ONE OF THOSE EVERY DAY, NOW, DO YOU?
HOW EXACTLY DID YOU TWO MEET, DOCTOR...AH, APHRA, WAS IT?
YOU KNOW, THE USUAL WAY PEOPLE MEET PEOPLE THESE DAYS.
IMPERIAL PRISON? ATTEMPTING TO MURDER ONE ANOTHER?
CLOSE. I WAS TRYING TO TAKE HIM PRISONER.
IT WOULD APPEAR YOU WERE SUCCESSFUL.
I'M NOT HER--
SORRY, I'M STILL HOUSE-TRAINING HIM. YOU KNOW THESE FARM BOYS.
I KNOW EVERY SORT OF CREATURE YOU CAN IMAGINE, DOCTOR. AND MANY I'M SURE YOU CANNOT.
THEY HAVE ALL BEEN PARADED THROUGH THE HALLS OF THIS CITADEL. ALL BY PEOPLE DESPERATE TO GAIN MY FAVOR.
BUT NEVER ONCE HAS ANYONE BROUGHT ME A JEDI.
I'M NOT A--
MY JEDI IS THRILLED TO MEET YOU, YOUR HIGHNESS. NOW WHY DON'T WE TALK ABOUT WHAT I WANT?
NOT JUST YET. FIRST...


I'LL NEED A BIT MORE VERIFICATION, IF YOU PLEASE.
AH, DESSERT.
I WOULD LIKE YOU TO OPEN THE TRAYS YOURSELF, MY YOUNG FRIEND.
WITHOUT TOUCHING THEM, OF COURSE.
SHE MEANS USE THE--
I KNOW WHAT SHE MEANS.

DOES IT NORMALLY TAKE HIM THIS LONG?
HE WORKS A BIT BETTER UNDER PRESSURE.
YES, OF COURSE. PERHAPS IF WE PROVIDE A LITTLE MORE... MOTIVATION.
VESPINAX, IF YOU PLEASE...

WUU--
REMOVE THE LID, BOY. OR I REMOVE YOUR HEAD.
UH... APHRA...LITTLE HELP HERE?
SORRY, BUDDY. I'M NOT THE JEDI.
AND I'D DO WHAT SHE SAYS IF I WAS YOU.
I'M *TRYING*, BUT I...
TRY HARDER.
SO ANYWAY, ABOUT MY *PAYMENT*.
I HAVE AN ARTIFACT OF THE *ORDU ASPECTU*. THE ARCHIVED PERSONALITY OF A JEDI CALLED *RUR*. I WANT TO KNOW HOW TO TURN IT ON.
YES, I'M SURE WE CAN DO THAT FOR YOU. DO YOU HAVE IT WITH YOU?
NO. BUT IT'S IN A SAFE PLACE.
I LIKE TO TRAVEL *LIGHT*.

THE DESSERT IS NO DOUBT MELTING. CANDIED RAT-MONKEY OFFAL IS QUITE ATROCIOUS WHEN LUKEWARM.
WHAT SEEMS TO BE THE MATTER WITH YOUR JEDI?
MY BLADE GROWS HUNGRY, BOY.
I'M TRYING. DON'T PUSH ME. I'M...
GUGGH!
LIKE I SAID, HE CAN BE A BIT FORCE-SHY. BUT DON'T WORRY, HE'LL GET THERE.
THOUGH I DON'T SEE WHY WE SHOULD HAVE TO WAIT FOR HIM. I MEAN, LIKE YOU SAID, CANDIED RAT-MONKEY IS BEST SERVED--
DO NOT TOUCH THE LID, DOCTOR APHRA, OR THE DEAL IS OFF.
RIGHT, WHATEVER YOU SAY, YOUR HIGHNESS.
YOU KNOW, IT'S *FUNNY*, THOUGH. I *LOVE* CANDIED RAT- MONKEY OFFAL. I EAT IT BY THE BUCKETFUL.
AND EVEN WITH THE LID ON, I CAN TELL...
...THIS DOESN'T SMELL *AT ALL* LIKE...
I SAID *DON'T*...

LUKE, WAIT, DON'T MOVE THE--!
GAAGH!
OH... DAMN.

THAT'S DESSERT?
RUN!

WHERE DO WE--
I DON'T KNOW! JUST RUN!
YOUR HIGHNESS.
SUCH A SHAME. I WAS SO LOOKING FORWARD TO *FEEDING* THIS MORNING.
I SHALL DEAL WITH THEM MYSELF.
NO...
LOCK DOWN THE CITADEL. DON'T LET THEM ESCAPE.

"...LET THE MENAGERIE DO THAT."
WHAT WERE THOSE THINGS BACK THERE?
ABERSYN SYMBIOTES. ONE OF THE MOST DANGEROUS ORGANISMS IN THE GALAXY.
CLASSIFIED "BEYOND QUARANTINE" BY THE EMPIRE. THEY GET ON YOU, THEY TAKE OVER ALL BRAIN AND MOTOR FUNCTIONS.
NOT ONLY WAS SHE PLANNING ON KEEPING YOU, SHE WAS GONNA KEEP ME, TOO. NASTY LITTLE QUEEN. I'M STARTING TO LIKE HER.
TRIPLE-ZERO, COME IN! PLEASE TELL ME YOU'RE IN POSITION! WE NEED A RIDE OUT OF HERE, AND FAST!
AH, YES, IT'S ALL GONE TO HELL, HASN'T IT? WISH I COULD SAY I WAS SURPRISED.
UNFORTUNATELY, MASTER, WE'RE A BIT INDISPOSED OURSELVES RIGHT NOW. DO YOU THINK YOU'LL BE ABLE TO CLING TO LIFE FOR A FEW MORE MOMENTS?
UH...

NOT VERY LIKELY.
YES, MASTER, BUT AS I SAID WE'RE...
...HELLO?
GAAAAAGGHH!
I DO APPRECIATE ALL THE LOVELY SCREAMING, BUT I'M AFRAID THAT'S NOT HELPING, MASTER APHRA. BEETEE AND I ARE IN DESPERATE NEED OF ORDERS.
GIVEN ALL THE SWITCHING UP OF ENEMIES AND ALLIES WE'VE BEEN DOING LATELY, PLEASE DO REMIND US...

...ARE WE STILL ALLOWED TO MURDER REBELS?

DOCTOR APHRA
NEXT ISSUE:
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